

What the Experts Say

Comments on PETA's Investigation Into Pilgrim's Pride's Chicken Slaughterhouse

Academic and professional experts in poultry welfare, veterinary medicine, and humane slaughter reviewed PETA's video footage from an investigation into Pilgrim's Pride's chicken slaughterhouse in Moorefield, W.Va. Below are some excerpts from these experts' statements:

Dr. Ian J.H. Duncan, Ph.D., Professor of Applied Ethology, University Chair in Animal Welfare, University of Guelph

Dr. Duncan is renowned as one of the world's leading poultry welfare experts and has published more than 30 book chapters and 150 scientific papers on animal welfare.

- “This tape depicts scenes of the worst cruelty I have ever witnessed against chickens.”
- “This is a completely unacceptable way to kill chickens and would violate the animal cruelty laws of all civilized countries.”
- “Slamming [chickens] against a wall is completely unacceptable as a method for killing birds. It would result in terrible injuries including bruising, broken bones and dislocated joints without first rendering the birds unconscious.”
- “The sum total of the pain and suffering inflicted on the chickens in the scenes is enormous and it is extremely hard to accept that this is occurring in the United States of America.”

Dr. Temple Grandin, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Animal Sciences, Colorado State University

Dr. Grandin is internationally regarded as one of the leading experts and industry consultants on farmed-animal slaughter, handling, and welfare. She has designed equipment and systems that are used in facilities across the country, and she serves on the animal-welfare panels of several leading corporations.

- “The behavior of the plant employees was atrocious. ... This is the WORST employee behavior I have ever seen in a poultry plant.”
- “Repeated kicking, stomping on and throwing of chickens is cruel animal abuse. Scientific research has clearly shown that chickens feel pain. Using chickens as footballs is horrible.”
- “The entire poultry industry should step forward and speak out against the animal abuse shown on this tape.”

Dr. Donald M. Broom, Ph.D., Professor of Animal Welfare, Department of Clinical Veterinary Medicine, University of Cambridge

Dr. Broom is a world-renowned expert on farmed-animal behavior and welfare and has written seven books and more than 300 scientific papers on various topics. He has served

as an animal-welfare advisor to governments, including serving as chair of the European Union Scientific Veterinary Committee (Animal Welfare Section).

- “I have visited many poultry slaughterhouses but I have never seen cruelty to chickens to the extent shown in this video. I consider that all of the incidents described ... would be grounds for a successful prosecution for cruelty to animals in most countries.”
- “Chickens are birds which live socially and have a full range of sensory abilities, including nociceptors. Their brains receive and analyse information from the nociceptors so they have an elaborate pain system. ... Their cognitive ability is sufficient for them to feel and respond to pain in a way which is very similar to that of humans and other mammals.”

Dr. Bernard E. Rollin, Ph.D., Professor of Animal Science, Biomedical Sciences, and Philosophy, University Distinguished Professor, University Bioethicist, Colorado State University

Dr. Rollin began teaching veterinary ethics at Colorado State University's College of Veterinary Medicine 28 years ago. He is internationally recognized as a leading expert in welfare and has published two books on the subject and lectured more than 600 times to tens of thousands of ranchers and farmers.

- “The tape showed evidence of a work force that apparently failed to recognize that chickens are living sentient beings capable of feeling pain and distress.”
- “Worker behavior was replete with overt cruelty of a sort that has been illegal under the cruelty laws for about 200 years. I am not talking about the standard criticisms of the poultry industry. ... I am referring to intentional, willful, malicious, aberrant, sadistic, purposeful infliction of pain and suffering on the animals to no profit-related end, the sort of behavior the anti-cruelty laws were expressly established to prevent and punish.”
- “I would urge the harshest penalties mandated by law for these workers, and particularly for the managers who allowed such behavior to become a pattern. The plant should be closed down until there is evidence of a workforce that can handle animals properly.”

Dr. A.B.M. Raj, B.V.Sc., M.V.Sc., Ph.D., School of Clinical Veterinary Science, Division of Farm Animal Science, University of Bristol

Dr. Raj has published more than 50 scientific papers on various methods of stunning and slaughter and served as a member of the working group on stunning and slaughter for the European Union Scientific Veterinary Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare. He is currently a member of working groups on stunning and slaughter for the European Food Safety Authority and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

- “Throwing live birds deliberately, as an object, either on another worker to attract his attention or taunt him, or to open a door is not an acceptable standard of poultry production and management. Throwing live chickens at targets would cause suffering and pain.”
- “I was astounded to see such a large number of live birds slammed against the belt rail, floor and wall within such a short time. Some of these birds were either kicked or indiscriminately caught by their wings and necks and put back on the conveyor belt to be processed for human consumption. The latter suggests that these birds were ‘fit for human consumption’ and therefore one could assume that the cruelty caused by slamming live chickens on the conveyor belt rail, floor and wall was to pacify or relieve frustration.”

Dr. Laurie Siperstein-Cook, Avian Veterinarian, D.V.M. from the School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California at Davis

Dr. Siperstein-Cook has a veterinary practice specializing in birds, including chickens, and has testified before the California Legislature on poultry welfare issues.

- “It’s obvious to me that the goal of throwing the chickens is for amusement of the workers but constitutes extreme and gratuitous cruelty.”
- “In NO case can the behavior of the workers be considered a necessary or acceptable way of killing or stunning chickens.”
- “When a chicken is thrown haphazardly like this, there is no way to control which body part hits the wall. If what hits the wall is the back or side or feet, the chicken is not likely to be knocked unconscious, but rather suffer broken bones, severe bruising and/or internal injuries.”